

Tactical Command and Control: Empowering Small-unit Leadership

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Tactical Command and Control:
Empowering Small-unit Leadership
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Introduction

"No single activity in war is more important than *command and control*."¹ Command and control (C2) is described in military doctrine and numerous publications as the key enabler that synchronizes the interaction of warfighting functions and components in a complex system. From a technical point of view, C2 is the organization of *C2 nodes*, supported by technological infrastructures and facilities, and their interaction as a system in a continuous battle cycle. The United States Army *Field Manual 6-0* defines C2 as "the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of a mission."² Key concepts emphasized in C2 include the following: information management, computer network infrastructure, battle cycles, *common operational picture*, and integrated planning between a commander and his functional staffs (See Figure 1).

Unfortunately, C2 doctrine today is only well established within a context more relevant to levels of command such as joint forces, divisions, brigades, or battalions. However, to be effective in their operational landscape, small-unit leaders (Company commanders and below) need a C2 framework that provides

¹ U.S. Department of the Navy, *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 6, Command and Control*, 4 Oct 1996, Ch 1, p. 35.

² U.S. Department of the Army, *Field Manual 6-0, Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*, 11 Aug 2003, Ch 1, para 1-2.

the conceptual foundation for their *fighting power* and enables decisive tactical actions.

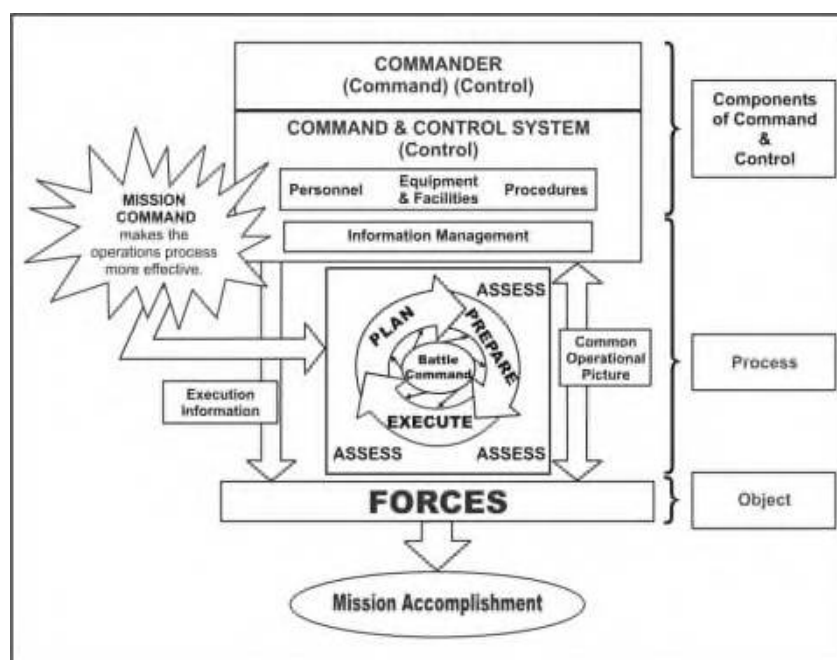


Figure 1: Command and Control, as defined by FM 6-0

Background

Small-unit leaders execute *techniques, tactics and procedures (TTPs)* in combat engagements and battles to derive effective tactical mission outcomes with decisive operational and strategic impact. Small-unit leaders are not merely close-combat fighters; they are the *linchpins* to decisive operational and strategic successes and *thinking combatants* with a clear operational purpose and intent. Small-unit leaders need to exercise effective C2 in their bid to achieve their assigned

tasks and purpose. Therefore, C2 for small-unit leaders is not limited to the exercise of *direct leadership*³ or the action-oriented execution of combat TTPs. It is a holistic process through which the small-unit leader integrates *cognitive thought* and *tactical actions* to accomplish the mission and *commander's intent*.

Small-unit Leader's Operational Landscape

Maneuver Warfare

"Maneuver warfare is a warfighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope."⁴ The essence of maneuver warfare focuses on rapid, opportunistic, flexible, and adaptive warfighting to gain an advantage over the enemy. Important tenets include a *mission command*⁵ philosophy, decentralized C2, a superior decision-making process, understanding the commander's intent, and subordinate initiative.

Small-unit leaders, therefore, need the ability to understand the purpose and relevance of their tactical actions

³ U.S. Department of the Army, *Field Manual 22-100, Army Leadership*, 31 Aug 1999, Ch 4 & 5. The Army Leadership framework describes *direct leadership* as "... face-to-face, first-line leadership", with the application of *interpersonal, conceptual, technical, and tactical* skills, to perform *influencing, operating, and improving* actions.

⁴ U.S. Department of the Navy, *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, Warfighting*, 20 Jun 1997, Ch 4, p. 73.

⁵ US FM 6-0, Ch 1, '*Mission Command*', para 1-67 – "*Mission command* is the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based on mission orders for effective mission accomplishment."

within their *battlespace*, and to fight with a *single-battle*⁶ mindset. The small-unit leader's single-battle mindset is two-fold: First, it is the *deep, close and rear* awareness of the tactical battlespace, viewing the area of operations as an indivisible entity and understanding the purpose of his tactical actions as part of an overall battlefield framework; and second, it is having the ability to understand and appreciate the operational and strategic implications of his tactical actions. Small-unit leaders need the cognitive capacity and mental agility for *sensemaking*⁷ and *tactical decisionmaking* in order to excel in the complex maneuver warfare landscape. C2 provides this comprehensive *situational awareness*.

The Three-Block War

General Charles C. Krulak, the thirty-first Commandant of the United States Marine Corps (USMC), described the battlefield of the twenty-first century as a hostile, lethal, and chaotic *three-block war* – conflicts and contingencies in which “Marines may be confronted by the entire spectrum of tactical challenges in the span of a few hours and within a space of three adjacent

⁶ U.S. Department of the Navy, *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-0, Marine Corps Operations*, 27 Sep 2001, Ch 6, p. 20.

⁷ Sensemaking is identified as an essential cognitive element of the military decision-making process (MDMP). Dennis K. Leedom, Ph.D., “Sensemaking Symposium Final Report”, Oct 2001, Command and Control Research Program (CCRP), Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence, p.3.

city blocks.”⁸ More importantly, General Krulak pointed out that the outcome of such operations hinges on decisions made by small-unit leaders. The *strategic corporal* will be required to “make well-reasoned and independent decisions under extreme stress. . . .”⁹ Hence, the concepts of the three-block war and the strategic corporal further amplify the importance of the small-unit leader as a thinking combatant. With the mission-essential competency to exercise effective C2, small-unit leaders can make sense out of the immediate tactical situation and take effective tactical actions to shape the desired operational and strategic outcomes.

Small-unit Leader’s Fighting Power

The British military doctrine discusses the concept of *fighting power* (termed as *combat power* by the US military) as the function of three inter-related components: *conceptual*, *moral*, and *physical*. The physical component is the means to fight; the moral component is the ability to get people to fight; and the conceptual component is the thought process.¹⁰ That is, the conceptual component provides the framework – the

⁸ Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three-Block War,” *Leatherneck*, Jan 1999, p.16. The lines separating the levels of war and distinguishing combatant from non-combatant is blur; use of asymmetric tactics by adversaries; and the effects of media in shaping the perceptions of the global audience.

⁹ Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three-Block War”, p.16.

¹⁰ British Army, *Design for Military Operations – The British Military Doctrine*, Army Code No. 71451, 1996, Ch 4, p.3.

Conceptual component – Principles of War, Military Doctrine, Development.

Moral component – Motivation, Leadership, Management.

Physical component – Manpower, Logistics, Equipment, Training & Readiness.

'right way' to fight that guides the application of the physical component, and the moral component provides the combat multiplier effect to generate fighting power.

Applying the concept of fighting power to the small-unit leader, his ability to fight in combat is, hence, a function of combat fitness, technical proficiency, and equipment (his physical component); leadership, values, and will to fight (his moral component); and TTPs, experience, and C2 framework (his conceptual component) (See Figure 2). The small-unit leader needs a C2 concept as a foundational framework to generate the right solutions for his situational application of TTPs, training, experience, leadership and tenacity. A concept of how to command and control will build and enhance his fighting power, enabling the small-unit leader to achieve tactical success and effectiveness.

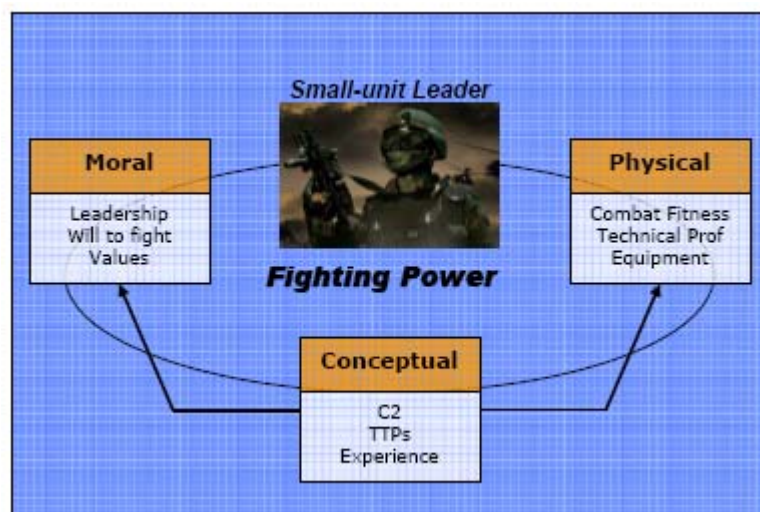


Figure 2: Fighting Power of the Small-unit Leader

Small-unit Tactical Command and Control

The ability to command and control is a core competency of the small-unit leader. His cognitive capacity for critical thinking is his C2 system, and his C2 nodes are his commander, his adjacent leaders, and his subordinate leaders or soldiers. C2 for the small-unit leader can be defined as the gathering of information, sensemaking, communication of decisions made through an established command structure and authority, and the exercise of direct leadership to achieve the mission and his commander's intent. The tactical C2 process for the small-unit leader begins with a single-battle mindset, through the *parallel, enmeshed and continuous* execution of C2 functions and tactical actions, until the accomplishment of the mission (See Figure 3).

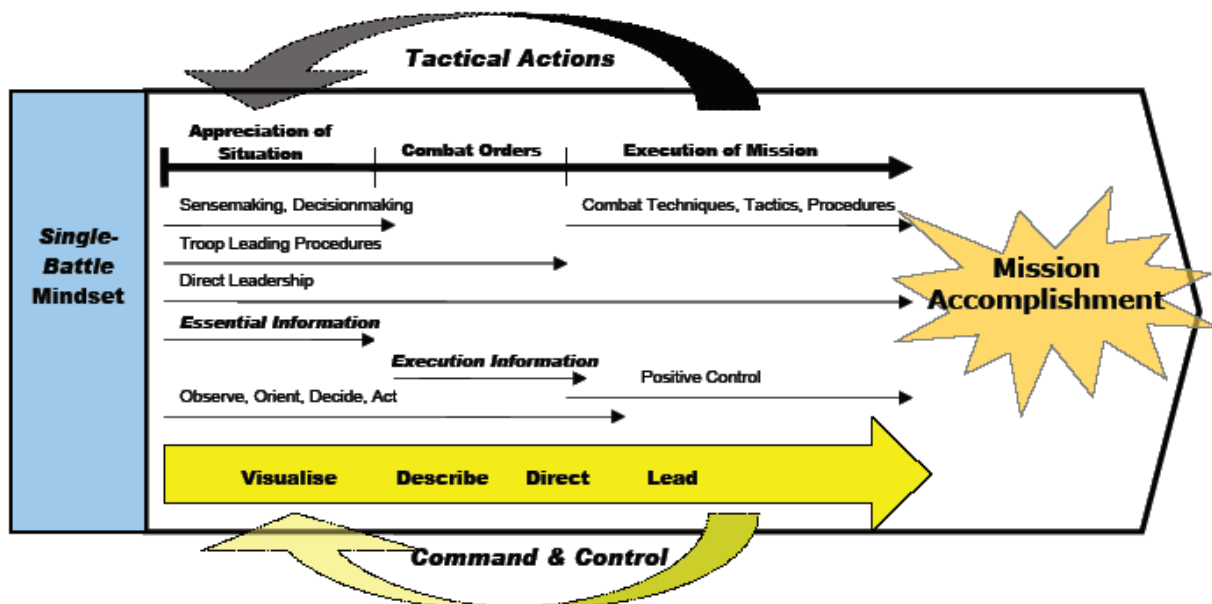


Figure 3: The Small-unit Leader's C2 process

The small-unit leader's tactical C2 process is an aggregate of existing doctrinal concepts and TTPs. The small-unit leader exercises C2 by performing the C2 functions of *visualize*, *describe*, *direct* and *lead*,¹¹ fused with a series of tactical actions - *troop leading procedures*¹² and the execution of the mission. Embedded within the C2 functions are existing concepts such as the *OODA loop*,¹³ *direct leadership*, and *positive control*.¹⁴

While a *commander*¹⁵ exercises C2 functions with the operational design process by leading his functional staffs through conceptual, functional and detail planning spanning across the entire battlespace, small-unit leaders on the other hand *visualize* and *describe* the tactical battlespace with emphasis in the *close fight*. Subsequently, they *direct* and *lead* subordinate leaders and soldiers in the execution of the close fight in tactical engagements.

¹¹ Concept adapted from US FM 6-0, '*Combining the Art of Command and Science of Control*', Ch 4, para 4-1.

¹² U.S. Department of the Army, *Field Manual 5-0, Army Planning and Orders Production*, 20 Jan 2005, Ch 4, para.4-2 - "*Troop leading procedures* is a dynamic process used by small unit leaders to analysis a mission, develop a plan, and prepare for an operation." It extends the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) methodology to Company and smaller units who do not have formal staffs to engage in the full MDMP.

¹³ John R. Boyd, "*Patterns of Conflict*" and "*An organic design for Command and Control*", quoted in U.S. Department of the Navy, *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 6, Command and Control*, 4 Oct 1996, Ch 2. p.63-64.

¹⁴ US FM 6-0, Ch 3, '*Positive Control*', para 3-95. Positive Control is a technique of regulating forces that involves commanders and leaders assessing, deciding and directing them.

¹⁵ *Commander* refers to military leaders of tactical units with functional staffs. In this paper, *commander* refers specifically to battalion commanders and above, engaging in military problem solving through the use of the MDMP.

Small-unit tactical C2 focuses on two key aspects: *essential information* and *execution information*.¹⁶ The small-unit leader performs his C2 functions to visualize, describe, direct and lead within these two information spheres. He obtains essential information, derives running estimates, develops a situational understanding and forms a *tactical situation picture* (TSP) of the close fight. He uses both intuitive and analytical decision-making processes to make sense out of the tactical situation. He communicates the TSP to his soldiers, and directs the process of mission accomplishment via the use of execution information. He exercises direct leadership and engages in positive control to actively influence the outcome of the mission. He continuously seeks current essential information to derive new estimates, to adjust his TSP, and to provide new directions until the accomplishment of the mission and commander's intent (See Figure 4).

Essential Information

Essential information for the small-unit leader includes *commander's intent*, *METT-TSLC*,¹⁷ *tactical principles* and *planning*

¹⁶ Concept adapted from US FM 6-0, '*Information*', Appendix B.

¹⁷ **M**ission, **E**nemy, **T**errain & **W**ather, **T**roops & **S**upport available, **T**ime, **S**pace, **L**ogistics, **C**ivil Considerations. The METT-TSLC is a combination of the US Marines' METT-TSL and the US Army's METT-TC. Contemporary battlefield challenges demands the small-unit leader's appreciation of the **civil considerations** – namely Rules of Engagement, legal constraints and restraints, population factors, political factors, Civil-military relations. Hence, the 'C' is proposed to be added to the comprehensive METT-TSL.

considerations.¹⁸ However, the commander's intent is an integral input to the small-unit leader's sense-making. The small-unit leader must understand the intent two levels up in order to establish a nested purpose between his tactical actions and operational or strategic outcomes – the single-battle mindset. Subsequently, the appreciation of the current situation, along with the application of planning tenets, completes the "observe" stage for the small-unit leader.

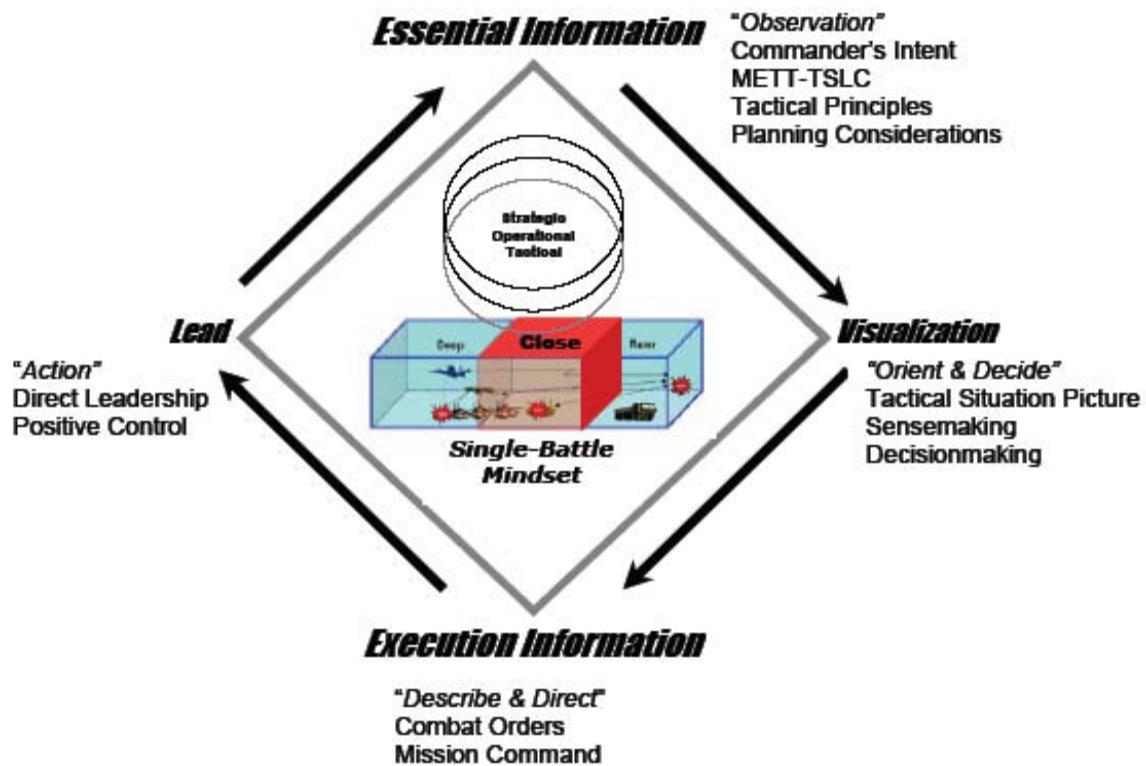


Figure 4: Essential Information, Execution Information (EI2)
framework for Small-unit Tactical C2

¹⁸ Tactical principles and planning considerations are fundamental dictums established for different types of operations such as principles of war, principles of offense and defense, etc.

Visualization

The cognitive integration of essential information feeds the visualization process, enabling the small-unit leader to derive an understanding of the tactical situation – sensemaking the TSP. Visualization also encompasses the mental rehearsal of the mission. The small-unit leader envisages the execution of the mission and its intended outcomes, allowing him to anticipate contingencies. He “orients” and engages in a decision-making process under the conditions of friction and uncertainty.

Execution Information

The small-unit leader communicates the TSP clearly down his chain of command, emphasizing the purpose, intent and mission end-state. He directs the tasks to be accomplished via the various forms of combat orders, with the application of mission command principles.

Lead

The small-unit leader exercises direct leadership and positive control in this “action” stage. He establishes *command presence*, and provides the strength, tenacity and motivation to follow the chosen course of actions. He focuses on the mission end-state, acts decisively with the commander’s intent in mind,

actively acquires new essential information, maintains situational awareness through continuous visualization, adapts to changing circumstances, and disseminates new execution information to ensure mission success.

Conclusion

In Operation Iraqi Freedom today, operations are small-unit fights, in which the concept of the "three-block war" has unfolded, and the "strategic corporal" is in effect.¹⁹ The battle of Fallujah further illustrated the asymmetric environment and urban nature of the evolving battlespace: "fluid and flexible fight on a nonlinear battlefield."²⁰ In such an operating environment, the application of tactical C2 by small-unit leadership is a critical attribute and force multiplier for units in action.

The USMC is developing a concept for *distributed operations* (DO) built upon the Marines' maneuver warfare mindset to meet emerging battlefield challenges. The essence of the DO concept lies in "the capacity for coordinated action by dispersed units, throughout the breadth and depth of the battlespace, ordered and connected within an operational design focused on a common aim."²¹ DO emphasizes a decentralized authority vested in junior

¹⁹ Christopher S. Tsirlis, "The MAGTF Officer in Iraq," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Dec 2004, p.16.

²⁰ Gary W. Anderson, "Fallujah and the Future of Urban Operations," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Nov 2004, p.52-53.

²¹ U.S. Department of the Navy, *A Concept for Distributed Operations*, 25 Apr 2005, Washington, D.C. p. I.

leaders leading small and dispersed units. A key implication of DO for combat development, as highlighted by the Marines, is the enhancement of training and professional education of small-unit leaders: "educating them to think and act at the tactical level of war, with an understanding of the application of commander's intent to achieve operational effects."²² Hence, small-unit tactical C2 is a key enabler to DO.

The ability of small-unit leaders to exercise effective C2 is essential to shape the desired outcome and success of operations in the complex warfighting environment of both today and tomorrow. Tactical C2 is the small-unit leader's solution to sensemaking, decisionmaking, and achieving the commander's intent. A tactical C2 framework for the small-unit leader, as articulated in the proposed EI2 model, is the conceptual foundation for small-unit fighting power. Tactical C2 empowers the *strategic* small-unit leader to utilize and integrate the other dimensions of his fighting power, to enable effective tactical actions and to achieve decisive operational and strategic effects. It is time for a paradigm shift in thinking about what is tactical command and control for the small-unit leader.

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²² *A Concept for DO*, p.V.

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